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Helga and the white
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HELGA AND
THE WHITE PEACOCK

By CORNELIA MEIGS

THE STEADFAST PRINCESS, A PLAY
THE POOL OF STARS
MASTER SIMON'S GARDEN
THE KINGDOM OF THE WINDING ROAD
THE WINDY HILL
HELGA AND THE WHITE PEACOCK



Margaret de M. Brown

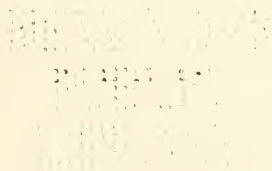
"I will whisper a dream in his ear that will serve to rouse him"

HELGA AND THE WHITE PEACOCK

*A PLAY IN THREE ACTS
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE*

BY
CORNELIA MEIGS

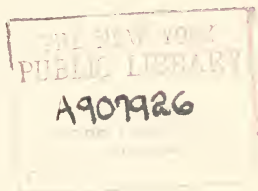
*With a frontispiece by RUTH BINGHAM, photographs
by MARGARET BROWNE, and notes on production
from the POUGHKEEPSIE COMMUNITY PLAYERS*



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CHARACTERS

HELGA.

OLAF, *her brother.*

THE YOUNGEST TROLL.

THE TROLL MOTHER.

THE SPIDER WOMAN, *the grandmother of all
the Trolls.*

THE WEST WIND.

THE GREY GOOSE.

THE PEACOCK.

Act I. The House of the Trolls.

Act II. A Forest.

Act III. The House of the Trolls

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HELGA AND
THE WHITE PEACOCK

HELGA AND THE WHITE PEACOCK

ACT I

The Interior of the Trolls' cottage, a dusty, cobwebby, comfortless place. Doors at the right and left, that at the left opening out-of-doors. At the back a closely curtained window. Tables or dressers against the wall are piled with sewing materials, boxes, etc., crowded and untidy. At the left a chair and table. At the right a large loom with a bench beside it, half facing the front of the stage.

On the chair at the left of the table sits the TROLL MOTHER, sewing. At her right sits the YOUNGEST TROLL, sorting colored skeins. HELGA sits on the weaver's bench. The YOUNGEST TROLL is swarthy and wrinkled, dressed in dark, dingy

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clothes, the TROLL MOTHER looks less wrinkled and more human, while her dark dress is relieved by a white kerchief. HELGA, a lighter-haired, white-skinned girl, wears the same dark dress but with a scarlet kerchief. She works at her weaving by fits and starts, stopping when she speaks, while the other two never cease toiling.

YOUNGEST TROLL

Five—six—seven. Troll Mother, do you know that it is my birthday?

TROLL MOTHER

I do, my son. You will soon be able to do the work of a man-Troll now.

HELGA

[Turning about on the bench.]

How old are you, Youngest Troll?

YOUNGEST TROLL

I do not remember. How old am I, Troll Mother?

TROLL MOTHER

One hundred years to-day. Yes, you are nearly grown.

HELGA

Do—do I ever have birthdays, Troll Mother?

TROLL MOTHER

No.

HELGA

Then you do not know how old I am?

TROLL MOTHER

Yes, that I do know. You are fourteen years old.

HELGA

Fourteen, and he is a hundred! I do not understand.

[The TROLL MOTHER says nothing, but goes on with her work.]

I had thought, somehow, that birthdays were fairer days than others, perhaps with more sunshine, or with wreaths of flowers and singing. But it may have been only a dream!

TROLL MOTHER

[Disturbed.]

What should we know of sunshine and singing here in the House of the Trolls? The only sunshine that we see drops through that high, round window in the roof and travels across the floor to

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tell us how the hours pass. You weave on your loom the colored stuff for birds' plumage and flower petals, but we can never see them bloom or flutter or shine in the world outside. It is the lot of all of us to sit here, toiling forever at the work of the Trolls.

HELGA

Have you never seen the world outside?

[As the TROLL MOTHER does not answer, she gets down from the bench and peers curiously at her troubled face.]

I think—I believe you have.

TROLL MOTHER

[To the YOUNGEST TROLL.]

Go carry my basket to the Spider Woman and bid her fill it with skeins of thread the colors of butterflies' wings. And do not loiter or she will be angry.

HELGA

Bring blue and scarlet and yellow skeins, as many as you can. I love their brightness in this dark place.

YOUNGEST TROLL

[*Stolidly.*]

I like the grey and black ones just as well.

[*He goes out at the left.*]

HELGA

Tell me, Troll Mother——

TROLL MOTHER

You must mind your work. What are you weaving?

HELGA

[*Mounting the weaver's bench again.*]

White fleecy stuff for clouds. The West Wind is blowing them all about the sky to-day. I can see them crossing the little window in the roof, I can hear him whistling and calling that he must have more.

[*She weaves busily for a time, then pauses again.*]

You say that no real Troll ever leaves this house?

TROLL MOTHER

None but the Spider Woman, the grandmother of all the Trolls. She rules us all and so may walk upon the earth, but she has forbidden the rest of us

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to put aside our tasks, lest the things that we make will be lacking to the world.

HELGA

But do the Trolls never grow weary? Do they not feel sorrowful? May they never be happy in knowing their tasks are done?

TROLL MOTHER

Trolls do not know weariness or sorrow or happiness, that is only for mortal bodies and for mortal souls. Trolls have no souls.

HELGA

Sometimes I have heard you sigh as though you were a little weary, sometimes I see you smile over your work as though it brought you faint happiness. And I—I am often weary and am always sad. Can it be that you are not a Troll, that I am not a Troll? You must tell me.

TROLL MOTHER

[Standing in the middle of the room. She is greatly troubled.]

For all our days we must dwell here in the House of the Trolls. Is not that enough to know?

HELGA

What have you in your apron?

TROLL MOTHER

Green blades of grass to cover bare, brown fields, for it is spring in the world to-day, little red leaf buds and yellow tassels to swing from the maple trees, white cups of May-apple blossoms. Now presently the warm West Wind will come to blow them over the whole earth.

HELGA

But I wish to know——

[She is interrupted by the entrance of the SPIDER WOMAN, bent, withered, lean, and terrible. She comes in leading the whimpering YOUNGEST TROLL and jerking him by the arm. Her very voice is evil.]

SPIDER WOMAN

Idle—idle again! The tasks in this house will never be done.

[She seats the YOUNGEST TROLL forcibly upon his stool.]

Here I find this fellow loitering below the window, letting the sunshine fall through his fingers.

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He said this maid had been talking of it and that he had never noticed it before. Things have come to a pretty pass when Trolls must stop to play in the sun.

[*She examines HELGA's work.*]

There is a great hole in this cloud stuff, how came it there?

HELGA

I wove it there so that when the cloud passes over the earth children can look up and see the stars.

SPIDER WOMAN

What do you know of children and earth and stars?

[*She looks darkly at the TROLL MOTHER.*]

You have been telling her what you should not. What secrets have you babbled?

TROLL MOTHER

Never one.

SPIDER WOMAN

Stitch up that rift then, leave no gaping holes.

HELGA

Oh, just a little one, space for one star.

SPIDER WOMAN

No words, no whining, do my bidding.

[The doors at each side open suddenly and the WEST WIND rushes through from right to left. He snatches up HELGA'S clouds, the TROLL MOTHER'S flowers and buds and goes out, banging the door behind him, leaving only a few petals scattered on the floor.]

YOUNGEST TROLL

What was that?

TROLL MOTHER

The West Wind, come to bear all that we have made out into the world.

HELGA

[Gleefully.]

And he took my cloud with the rift in it, so that the children shall see the stars when they go to bed to-night.

SPIDER WOMAN

You dare to defy me? We shall see that silly laughter turning to tears.

[She raises her hand threateningly.]

You shall suffer for such folly.

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HELGA

Oh, do not strike me. Will no one aid me? Will no one help me?

SPIDER WOMAN

[*With scorn.*]

To whom do you call for aid?

HELGA

I might have a friend, there in the world outside, a friend who might hear and help me.

SPIDER WOMAN

Trolls have no friends.

[*There is a knock at the outer door, and the GREY GOOSE comes in. The SPIDER WOMAN advances to greet him.*]

And who may you be, sir?

GREY GOOSE

A bird of passage, all blown about by storms. They tell me you weave plumage for birds here in the House of the Trolls. Can you mend that?

[*He displays a long rent in his feathered cloak.*]

SPIDER WOMAN

We do, sir, she shall weave the web at once. Stop staring, child.

[HELGA, *peering over her shoulder as often as she dares, sets about the work. The SPIDER WOMAN bustles about, evidently dying for a bit of gossip. The GREY GOOSE takes off his cloak and hangs it beside the loom. He sits down on the stool. The SPIDER WOMAN speaks to the TROLL MOTHER.*]

Go fetch our guest a cup and loaf of bread.

[*The TROLL MOTHER goes out, taking the YOUNGEST TROLL with her. The SPIDER WOMAN sits down in her chair.*]

How blows the good North Wind? I sometimes think his voice is less strong than it used to be.

GREY GOOSE

Do winds grow old after a million years?

SPIDER WOMAN

They say the South Wind loves the round, full moon, and sighs and languishes for him through the hot summer nights. I always thought her a weak, foolish thing. Come, have you no news to tell us?

GREY GOOSE

It is not news, but gossip that you wish to hear, oh, grandmother of all the Trolls.

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SPIDER WOMAN

Gossip! What, I? I have no time to talk.

[She flounces out indignantly.]

GREY GOOSE

I thought as I came near, that I heard a little, frightened voice crying for help. Could it chance to have been yours?

HELGA

It was mine. I thought there might be a friend near with good will to help me, even though I did not know it.

GREY GOOSE

But they tell me that Trolls know naught of friendship and good will, that they have no souls. But you cried out like a frightened human child.

HELGA

I am not a child, only a Troll like the others.

GREY GOOSE

What do you think of as you sit toiling all day at your loom?

HELGA

I think of strange things that I have never seen but must have known in dreams. I think of low-

roofed cottages with wide windows and the light of warm, red fires shining through them in the dusk. I think of a great yellow moon that comes up and up behind the trees and shows birds in nests and cradles by cottage hearths and mothers putting their sleepy boys and girls to bed by candlelight. Oh, Grey Goose, do you ever see such things?

GREY GOOSE

That I do, and often. During the cold winter that is past, living was lean in the woods and fields, so I must needs go to beg and peck about the farmyards among the cocks and hens, although I am a wild bird. I have seen all the things of which you speak. At one cottage there was a good lad who fed me every day until the snow was gone. It was a kind household, but a sad one.

HELGA

What made it sad?

GREY GOOSE

They had a strange child, stunted, always wailing, that could never learn to speak. It should have been the twin sister to the lad who cared for me, but it had never grown or laughed or spoken. There

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was an old, old woman who nursed and cared for it who said it was a changeling.

HELGA

A changeling? What is that?

GREY GOOSE

They say that Trolls, for all they toil so hard and long, can somehow never work as mortals do. They do not know the bright colors, the flowers' scents or how the wild birds like the feathers in their wings. And so sometimes they steal a child out of the cradle and leave a Troll-baby in its place, a crying, puny thing that can never become a real mortal.

[The TROLL MOTHER has come in and stands listening intently. HELGA has come down from her bench, the weaving quite forgotten.]

HELGA

And the human child, what do they do with it?

GREY GOOSE

It dwells in the House of the Trolls and never really knows that once it lived on earth, although memories like far, forgotten dreams pass before its

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eyes as it sits toiling. For it alone knows how to laugh for happiness or weep for sorrow, knows how to love and long for its lost home.

HELGA

[Repeating to herself.]

Memories like far, forgotten dreams.

TROLL MOTHER

[Laying her hand on the GREY GOOSE'S arm.]

And what of the little Troll, all alone in that strange, wide world? Does it never wish to be at home again? Does its Troll Mother never long to have it in her arms, to hold it to her empty heart?

[The SPIDER WOMAN comes in. She fixes the TROLL MOTHER with so keen and cruel a glance that she shrinks back.]

SPIDER WOMAN

Trolls have no hearts.

[She comes threateningly toward HELGA, but the GREY GOOSE puts his arm about the girl and she goes on questioning him, unafraid.]

HELGA

Tell me more of that boy.

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GREY GOOSE

He alone of all the house was cheery, he used always to sing about his work. He was making ready for a journey, to go to seek his lost sister, yet it was only I who guessed his purpose.

HELGA

What did he sing? I have never heard music, only the humming of the Spider Woman's wheel.

[The GREY GOOSE sings, first alone, then teaching HELGA. She joins in, unsteadily at first, but in the end sings with him confidently. The TROLL MOTHER hums the air and finally, even, the YOUNGEST TROLL who comes in at the left. Both of the latter two, however, stop at a fierce glance from the SPIDER WOMAN. She sits at the right with her small hand distaff, spinning steadily as HELGA and the GREY GOOSE sing, uninterrupted, to the end.]

SONG

HELGA

That mortal who lives in the House of the Trolls, can she never go home again?

GREY GOOSE

Sometimes a fellow being comes to seek her out, one who loves her enough to follow her all across the world. But it is a hard, long journey to come to the place where she is.

HELGA

And if he never comes to find her——?

SPIDER WOMAN

She dwells among the Trolls, toiling and forgetting until little by little the mortal spirit dies within her. She loses her wild dreams and her memories, she thinks only of work and work and work again, with no daft fancies for the world outside. Mortals have short years and stormy ones, with their sorrows and hopes and desires, but she who becomes a Troll will live for a thousand years without a care—and without a soul.

HELGA

[*Clinging to* GREY GOOSE.]

Oh, is it true? Am I a mortal? Must I become a Troll?

SPIDER WOMAN

Yes, it is true. Your soul will die within you.

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Ask the Troll Mother yonder, does she remember that she once was mortal?

TROLL MOTHER

Yes—no—yes. Five hundred years have I dwelt here and have lost all memory and all knowledge, but still there is sometimes a dull ache here, where mortals have their hearts, when I think of my Troll-baby, my changeling child that dwells on earth. Grey Goose, can you not bring it back again?

GREY GOOSE

Only if this maid wins back to earth once more. That boy in the cottage dooryard, it was in his mind to go to search for his sister, stolen by the Trolls. If his love and strength and courage can carry him to the very world's end, then she may return and your changeling Troll shall come back to you.

TROLL MOTHER

[Despairingly.]

There is no one who will have love and courage to suffice for such a task.

SPIDER WOMAN

A fine journey he will have, across forests and

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mountains and seas, with storms to stay him and hunger and weariness and—the spells of Trolls.

GREY GOOSE

He is a brave boy and he has a stout heart. His hair is brown—like yours, his eyes are bright—like yours, he is called Olaf.

SPIDER WOMAN

Stop—I will have no more of this.

[She faces the GREY GOOSE in fury. They are interrupted by the opening of the door at the right and the ceremonious entrance of the PEACOCK.]

YOUNGEST TROLL

Here is the Peacock, come for his new spring feathers.

PEACOCK

Have you them ready, Spider Woman? Of course my old cloak is still fairer than that of any other bird, but with the new season I must have splendor like the rising sun's. I owe it to the world.

GREY GOOSE

Suppose you should lose those gay feathers, brother, would the earth stop turning?

PEACOCK

[*Seriously.*]

I believe it would.

[*The YOUNGEST TROLL has gone out and now comes in with his arms full of peacock's feathers. The TROLL MOTHER begins to pin them to the PEACOCK'S cloak while he preens, struts, and gives critical directions.*]

A little lower, so, my good woman, that gives a better line. Now, that one more to the left so that the sweep of color be not broken. Did she

[*Indicating HELGA.*]

weave those colors?

TROLL MOTHER

Yes. Is not the work of the other Trolls to your liking?

PEACOCK

It does well enough for ordinary birds, but the feathers of the Peacock must be wrought by one who loves them.

GREY GOOSE

Should not your cloak be longer, brother, to cover your feet?



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"The feathers of the Peacock must be wrought by one who loves them"

PEACOCK

What need to cover them? They are not my best point to be sure, but then, all eyes are ever gazing at my beautiful tail.

HELGA

[*Who is now mending the cloak of the GREY GOOSE.*]

You must be the fairest bird on earth.

PEACOCK

[*Ruefully.*]

No, not quite. The race of Peacocks surpasses every other, but alas, the white ones are more glorious than are we ordinary fowl. To be a white Peacock, stepping so stately along a terrace, trailing the ghostly beauty of a graceful tail, ah, that were happiness beyond belief. Could you not make me a coat of white feathers, Spider Woman?

SPIDER WOMAN

We are too busy to care for such vanities. The birds of all the earth are coming for their new plumage now.

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HELGA

I love to see them with their wide wings and their bright breasts. But Peacock, you are truly the most beautiful of all.

PEACOCK

Ah, you have never seen the white Peacocks! But there is one thing I have, in spite of colors, that is the equal of theirs.

GREY GOOSE

What is that?

PEACOCK

My voice!

[He begins singing in a loud, harsh scream that causes HELGA to put her hands to her ears as he struts out.]

SPIDER WOMAN

[To the GREY GOOSE.]

Your cloak also is finished. Is there further use for tarrying, filling idle ears with mischief?

[The GREY GOOSE takes his coat of feathers and puts it on.]

HELGA

Oh, Grey Goose, do not fly far away. Come back and bring me news of the wide world.

TROLL MOTHER

Bring news of my Troll-baby.

SPIDER WOMAN

[*Furiously.*]

Peace. Hold your tongue.

TROLL MOTHER

Oh, bid her brother hasten, before the House of the Trolls has stolen her soul.

GREY GOOSE

[*To HELGA.*]

Have courage, do not lose heart. Remember that you are the child of mortals.

TROLL MOTHER

But the days are so long and the toil so heavy! It is so easy to forget as I forgot.

[*The GREY GOOSE suddenly throws back the curtain of the window at the rear of the stage. The opening shows a great cobweb spun across it.*]

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GREY GOOSE

These clinging threads, why, I cannot break them.

SPIDER WOMAN

They are spells that I have spun. Good spells, potent magic, Troll spells.

TROLL MOTHER

Then Trolls' hands can break them.

[She tears free a corner of the web so that HELGA can look out.]

HELGA

Oh, the world, the wide, green, beautiful world!

GREY GOOSE

The world across whose seas your brother comes to save you.

[The SPIDER WOMAN jerks back the curtain.]

SPIDER WOMAN

Begone from here.

[The GREY GOOSE opens the outer door, spreads his cloak for flight and disappears. The curtain falls, going up again in a moment to show the SPIDER WOMAN spinning and muttering

new spells across the closed window, the TROLL MOTHER and the YOUNGEST TROLL at work again, and HELGA, dreaming, with her chin on her hand, singing to herself the song the GREY GOOSE taught her.]

CURTAIN

ACT II

A wood with trees, bushes, and flowers on all three sides of the stage. A log or a stone at the left, large enough to sit on. The boy OLAF is working in the middle of the stage, mending the broken rudder of a boat. He is whistling the air of the song in the last act. There is a rustle in the bushes, he stops to listen, then snatches up the bow that lies in the grass beside him and fits an arrow to the string. He waits motionless, but, as the rustling ceases, he lays down his weapon and returns to work. When his back is turned, the SPIDER WOMAN peers out of the bushes.

The PEACOCK comes in at the right and struts back and forth, hoping for admiration. After one brief glance, however, OLAF is too busy to notice him. The PEACOCK is obliged to come nearer and nearer, his haughty manner giving way more and more to desire for notice and to curiosity.

PEACOCK

Ah—a hem!

[OLAF *paying no attention, the PEACOCK comes closer still, so that the boy, reaching for a nail, bumps against him.*]

You great, rude, clumsy creature.

OLAF

[*Turning about to look.*]

I ask your pardon, sir. Oh, what a wonderful bird!

[*The PEACOCK is delighted, he struts and poses, looks over his shoulder to see if OLAF is looking and finds that he is not.*]

PEACOCK

[*Snappishly.*]

You work as though life itself hung upon your task.

OLAF

I work in a good cause.

PEACOCK

What is that?

OLAF

It is to search for my lost twin sister.

PEACOCK

Where do you expect to find her?

OLAF

I do not know.

PEACOCK

And what are you doing here?

OLAF

I have traveled far and have come at last to this wide sea that thunders yonder on the beach. Washed up in the sand, far even above the tide, is an old boat, not quite so wrecked and broken but that I have managed to mend her again. Even her tattered sail I have patched and made ready for use, and now when I have put together her broken rudder she will be in proper state to put to sea.

PEACOCK

And what will you find on the other side?

OLAF

My sister, so I hope. She has been lost so many long years, ever since a wretched changeling Troll appeared in the cradle in her place, to cry all day and never move or speak.

PEACOCK

A Troll? Now that is strange.

OLAF

[*Eagerly.*]

Do you know aught of Trolls?

PEACOCK

I? Yes, surely, since the Trolls have the honor to weave these feathers for me, fresh new ones every year. But where is the use of bright new plumage when there is no one at hand to admire it? If I could but abide in some great garden, instead of this lonely wood, then folk might do me justice.

OLAF

In my travels I passed by a palace with wide gates and great marble steps and a white Peacock standing at each side.

PEACOCK

[*In sudden rage.*]

Talk not to me of white Peacocks, faded creatures, affected pieces, posing forever and asking for admiration.

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OLAF

[Soothingly.]

I did not mean that they were fairer than you.

PEACOCK

But the truth is that they are.

[He sits down dejectedly upon the log.]

My whole life long I have wished to be a white Peacock.

OLAF

Do not the Trolls, when they make your new feathers, think that you are beautiful?

PEACOCK

Trolls know nothing but how to toil from dawn to dark, they have no eyes for glittering color or grace of form. But there was one, a young maid, who saw at least that I was more glorious than the rest.

[He shakes his head sadly.]

But her ear for music was sadly wanting.

OLAF

A young maid among the Trolls! What was she like?

PEACOCK

Why, now that I think of it, she was not unlike you, she was young and unwrinkled, fairer than the other Trolls. She had brown hair——

[The SPIDER WOMAN, peering from the bushes, makes violent gestures to him to be silent.]

brown eyes—— Eh, what is it?

[He stops, confounded by the SPIDER WOMAN'S threatening gestures behind OLAF'S back. She disappears, leaving the PEACOCK more bewildered than ever.]

OLAF

[Eagerly.]

Brown eyes did you say?

PEACOCK

Er—er—I think so, or perhaps they may have been green.

[He strolls toward the back of the stage.]

OLAF

Brown hair?

PEACOCK

Er——

[Once more the SPIDER WOMAN threatens him in pantomime.]

It might have been—white.

[The SPIDER WOMAN comes close enough to whisper to him, motioning to him to go. He hesitates, waits a moment, but goes out just before OLAF finishes speaking. The SPIDER WOMAN, just visible, is spinning with her distaff as though she were spinning out the soft, sleepy music that begins to be heard. OLAF yawns.]

OLAF

It is late and my arms are weary. And yet I had meant to finish the boat to-night and launch her at dawn, if I can drag her down the beach.
I——

[He yawns fearfully again.]

I must work on. Peacock, will you not help me? Oh, he is gone.

[The music becomes more and more insistent. The SPIDER WOMAN begins to steal out from

among the bushes. Very slowly OLAF puts down his tools, gives way to drowsiness and, leaning against the rudder, falls asleep. The SPIDER WOMAN bends over him and drops a long thread of her spinning across him. The GREY GOOSE comes in at the right, stands watching for a moment, then strides forward and snatches away the spun strand. OLAF sleeps on.]

SPIDER WOMAN

You shall not wake him.

GREY GOOSE

The strength of his purpose will awaken him.

SPIDER WOMAN

I vow that he shall sleep on until it is too late.

GREY GOOSE

I will whisper a dream in his ear that will serve to rouse him.

[He stoops and whispers in OLAF'S ear. The SPIDER WOMAN sits on the log, the GREY GOOSE stands opposite, both watching the boy intently.]

SPIDER WOMAN

He will sleep on.

GREY GOOSE

He will awake.

[OLAF *stirs, half rouses himself, drops to sleep again. Finally, with a desperate effort of one shaking off a dream, he manages to open his eyes. As he grows more and more awake, the SPIDER WOMAN retreats to the background, the music dies away and the GREY GOOSE advances to stand behind him as he begins to work again.*]

OLAF

[*Wonderingly to himself.*]

I had dreamed of Helga often, but never so clearly before. I seemed really to see her toiling away in a dark little hut all full of dust and cobwebs, with a strange, wrinkled child beside her and a woman whose eyes were green and her hair white as though they were—— Ah, that is it, as though they were Trolls. And she looked so sad and weary.

[*He begins to hammer energetically.*]

I cannot lose a moment in going to seek her. If

I miss the high tide there will be a whole day lost.

[He looks about in search of a stone to prop the rudder and sees the GREY GOOSE.]

Oh, it is the wild Grey Goose that the cold winter drove into our poultry yard. Is all well with you, good sir?

GREY GOOSE

So well that since then I have been on a far journey, even so far as the House of the Trolls. And while I was there I saw a maiden——

OLAF

Oh!

GREY GOOSE

She sat at her loom all day, weaving white clouds, green whispering leaves, and the petals of flowers. But she used to grow, oh, so weary of her task, she used to weep, although Trolls never weep. And when I talked with her she laughed, yet Trolls never laugh.

OLAF

How far from here is that House of the Trolls?

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GREY GOOSE

It is across that wide sea that has stopped your journey.

OLAF

My boat lies on the shore, waiting only for the mending of this rudder to set sail.

GREY GOOSE

Your boat lies deep in the sand and a long way up the beach.

OLAF

I will succeed in launching it, never fear.

[He works for a little, then yawns.]

It is strange how drowsiness hangs upon me so that I can scarcely see. Perhaps it were better to wait for morning.

GREY GOOSE

Listen earnestly to what I say. There are errands that call me far beyond the forest so that I may not wait here through the night to help you. But I will return at dawn, to fly before you as you cross the sea, so that you may know how to set your helm and trim your sails and reach in safety

that other shore where stands the House of the Trolls. But of one thing you must make sure. Your boat stands so high above the water that on only one night of all the year is the tide high enough to set it afloat and that is this very night. The tide is full at dawn and, should your task not be done, should you be sleeping, the chance is lost for twelve long months. There are evil charms at work about you, but the strength of your resolve must be too great for them. Can you do it? Will you be ready?

OLAF

Yes.

[He works with renewed energy. The GREY GOOSE goes out. The SPIDER WOMAN leans from the bushes and speaks to him as he passes.]

SPIDER WOMAN

You are bold to leave him there alone. My spells will make vain his errand yet.

GREY GOOSE

Trolls' spells have little power over true hearts.

SPIDER WOMAN

The spells of the Trolls robbed the Troll Mother of her soul.

GREY GOOSE

That is because she grew weary, lost faith and hope, and yielded to you at last. But you do not understand the creatures of this world, Spider Woman.

SPIDER WOMAN

You do not know my power, Grey Goose.

GREY GOOSE

I will trust to the power of an earnest heart. And you will find the strength of your charms will be wrecked upon some little, unthought-of thing, the goodness of some world-dweller, his blindness or his folly, some slight matter on which you never reckoned, for all your Troll wisdom. You shall see.

SPIDER WOMAN

It is you who shall see.

[*The GREY GOOSE goes out and the SPIDER WOMAN approaches OLAF.*]

You work late, my son.

OLAF

Indeed, good mother, it grows toward morning and I work early.

SPIDER WOMAN

Are you not in need of sleep? Look now, I will watch here that no harm comes to your property while you lie down in comfort on the leaves and sleep a little.

[She spins her distaff and the drowsy music sounds again.]

OLAF

[With a great yawn.]

It is true that I am so sleepy I can hardly lift my hands, but it would not be fitting that I should lie down and rest while you, who are as weary as I, should sit awake to mind my task.

SPIDER WOMAN

[Aside.]

A pest on the lad!

[To OLAF.]

As I came through the wood, I saw a tree all laden down with ripe, red fruit, the branches trail-

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ing nearly to the ground. Are you not hungry? Why not go fetch some for yourself and me?

OLAF

That tree was planted and tended by a poor woodcutter that lives in this forest. His wife gave me a bowl of milk last night though she could ill spare it. I think they need all the fruit for themselves and their five children.

SPIDER WOMAN

Then, will you not stop your work for a little and sit and talk to me. I am a lonely, sad old woman.

OLAF

I—er—er, good mother, you must pardon me, but my task allows no delay.

[*Aside.*]

She is so ugly that I could not—could not sit down beside her.

SPIDER WOMAN

Plague take the boy!

[*The PEACOCK comes in.*]

PEACOCK

I heard voices and thought there might be some new person here who would like to see my feathers. It is thought that they appear to great advantage by this soft twilight of the early morning.

SPIDER WOMAN

We have all of us seen your feathers a score of times, Sir Peacock.

PEACOCK

[*Wistfully to OLAF.*]

Are you so busy working still? You should pause and look about you to see the—the beauties of nature.

[*Parades himself.*]

OLAF

Have you shown yourself to the woodcutter's children?

PEACOCK

Yes, and they came running to pull the feathers out of my tail. These peasants have no appreciation of real beauty and this forest is no proper place for a bird like me. Once when I was quite

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young, in the full glory of my first plumage, I dwelt for a little time in a garden, not such a very great garden, but one fair enough. The hedges were high and dark to make a background for my glowing colors and there was a bit of grass beside the fountain where I could walk up and down and spread my tail in the sun.

OLAF

Yes, and why did you not stay there always?

[Although he tries to listen politely, the PEACOCK'S prosy talk evidently makes him sleepy.]

PEACOCK

There was to be a feast, and some uncouth fellow who hung about the kitchen began to raise disagreeable talk about a peacock pie. And so I came away to this forest. But one day, by the fountain, I said to a pigeon who sat perched on the edge, I said, "This sunlight is excellent," and he said, would you believe it, he said, "Yes, it feels warm between my wings." As though it mattered how he felt.

[OLAF yawns, nods, finally puts down his tools.]

OLAF

My task is done, I will rest a little before I carry the rudder down to the boat. Just rest, not sleep.

[His eyes close.]

SPIDER WOMAN

Did you say anything further to the pigeon, good sir?

[Her sharp voice arouses OLAF instantly, and he begins gathering his tools. He falls asleep outright, however, when the PEACOCK begins talking again.]

PEACOCK

I merely said to him that sunshine was better for displaying colors than warming backs and he replied that it did seem to brighten his plumage somewhat, but that he could not see it very clearly in the fountain. He was looking at himself!

[The SPIDER WOMAN makes a sign to the PEACOCK to go on talking, but he does not understand. She tiptoes over to him and speaks close to his ear.]

SPIDER WOMAN

The poor lad is worn out and your most inter-

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esting words help him to forget his toil. Do not be silent, friend; your fine talk edifies us both.

PEACOCK

Really, it seems as though he were scarcely attending.

SPIDER WOMAN

He sleeps and dreams; I would he could sleep forever. Let him but slumber through the dawn and he will miss the tide and never launch his boat. He seeks the House of Trolls, and should he steal away that maiden, Helga, who wove that coat of yours, you may whistle long for another. The tide will serve his purpose at sunrise, and look, the dawn is breaking now. Keep him asleep if you value the beauty of your fine dress, go on with your talk, your soothing, poetical flow of speech.

PEACOCK

I know what will soothe him, poor lad, even better than my talking.

SPIDER WOMAN

What is that?

PEACOCK

My singing!

[He walks up and down, pouring out his harsh, screaming song that rouses OLAF at once.]

OLAF

The dawn! The high tide! I had almost missed it.

[He seizes the rudder and rushes out.]

PEACOCK

Why, it awakened him!

SPIDER WOMAN

Fool! Dolt! Empty-headed bird of vanity.

PEACOCK

Ah, see, the high water is lapping the very keel of his boat. He pushes, he launches forth, he is afloat and spreading his sail to the wind. And see the great Grey Goose coming on swift wings to fly above him.

[The SPIDER WOMAN snatches up the bow and arrows that OLAF has left behind. She tries vainly to pull the string, then thrusts the weapon into the PEACOCK'S hands.]

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SPIDER WOMAN

I will give you a cloak of white feathers if you shoot the arrow straight.

PEACOCK

Real ones, white peacock's feathers?

SPIDER WOMAN

Yes, yes, make haste.

PEACOCK

I do not do it willingly—but to be a white peacock——

[He shoots the arrow.]

I missed him.

[He seems not at all sorry.]

SPIDER WOMAN

Yes, but do you not see, the arrow pierced the breast of the Grey Goose flying above his head.

CURTAIN

ACT III

The same scene as Act I. HELGA sits at the end of the weaving bench watching the YOUNGEST TROLL blow tiny bubbles as he sits on his stool beside her. He drops the finished ones into a big bowl on the floor.

HELGA

Why do you blow such little ones, Youngest Troll?

YOUNGEST TROLL

They are raindrops.

HELGA

Let me blow.

[She takes a second pipe and begins blowing.]

YOUNGEST TROLL

You blow them too big.

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HELGA

These are for the first great, heavy drops of an April shower, when the sun is still shining, to make them gleam like silver.

[They scatter them all over the stage. Finally HELGA holds one up, the YOUNGEST TROLL joins his to it, and they blow a great bubble together. The TROLL MOTHER comes in. HELGA is laughing.]

TROLL MOTHER

What are you doing?

HELGA

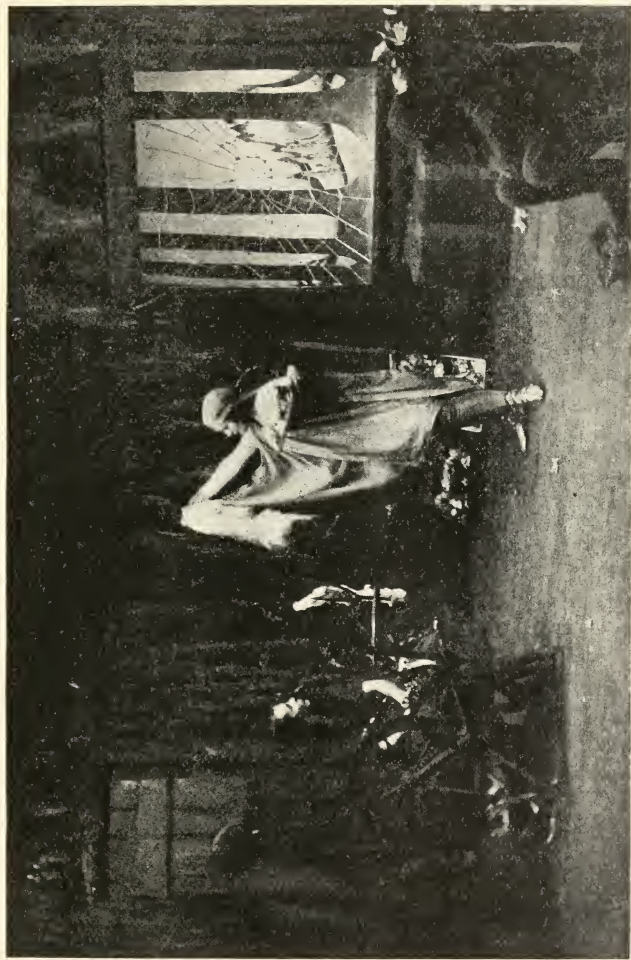
We are making a rainbow.

TROLL MOTHER

They are waiting for showers on the thirsty earth while you are sitting here frolicking and laughing and making rainbows. What are rainbows? They are neither sunshine to bring blossoms, nor rain to make the world green.

HELGA

They make children glad.



Margaret de M. Broun

"Let's make a rainbow,"

TROLL MOTHER

[*With scorn.*]

Gladness! It only brings sorrow after it.

HELGA

You did not speak so a little time ago when the Grey Goose had been here. Then you seemed to remember that you were mortal once.

TROLL MOTHER

I thought for a foolish moment that he could lead your brother hither and that you could go back to earth again. But I am wrong. Weeks have passed and no one has come. The Grey Goose will never come back.

HELGA

He will come back. I will not cease to hope.

TROLL MOTHER

It is foolish to hope, it brings only pain.

HELGA

Is despair better?

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TROLL MOTHER

Despair is followed by forgetfulness at last.

HELGA

Oh, but to sit here forever, toiling and toiling, with no hope and no happiness, nothing but work for a thousand years!

[She buries her face in her hands.]

TROLL MOTHER

Tears run dry in the end and one forgets all things.

HELGA

And your Troll-baby that was carried away to live on earth, have you forgotten that?

TROLL MOTHER

No, I have not forgotten that—yet.

HELGA

And will you, in a thousand years?

TROLL MOTHER

Yes, even that in a thousand years.

*[HELGA sighs deeply and begins her weaving.
The SPIDER WOMAN comes in.]*

SPIDER WOMAN

You weave more steadily than once you did.
Here is a great, long web for leaves and flowers and
birds. How came you to finish it so quickly?

[HELGA *does not reply.*]

Come, I will have an answer.

YOUNGEST TROLL

Oh, look, how bright my raindrops are!

TROLL MOTHER

[*Indifferently.*]

Some of her tears fell into your bowl. Bubbles
are always the brighter for tears.

SPIDER WOMAN

You shall tell me why you work with so much
greater diligence. And what is this new pattern
that differs so from any that the Trolls have ever
taught you?

[HELGA *does not answer.*]

YOUNGEST TROLL

She told me that she was weaving a message for
all the trees and flowers and birds.

SPIDER WOMAN

A message? To whom? What do you mean?

[She shakes him by the arm.]

YOUNGEST TROLL

[Whimpering.]

I do not know.

SPIDER WOMAN

He shall bear the punishment if you do not tell me.

HELGA

I was weaving a message to tell all living creatures that I am held here prisoner and that they are to bid my brother come to find me.

[The SPIDER WOMAN releases the YOUNGEST TROLL.]

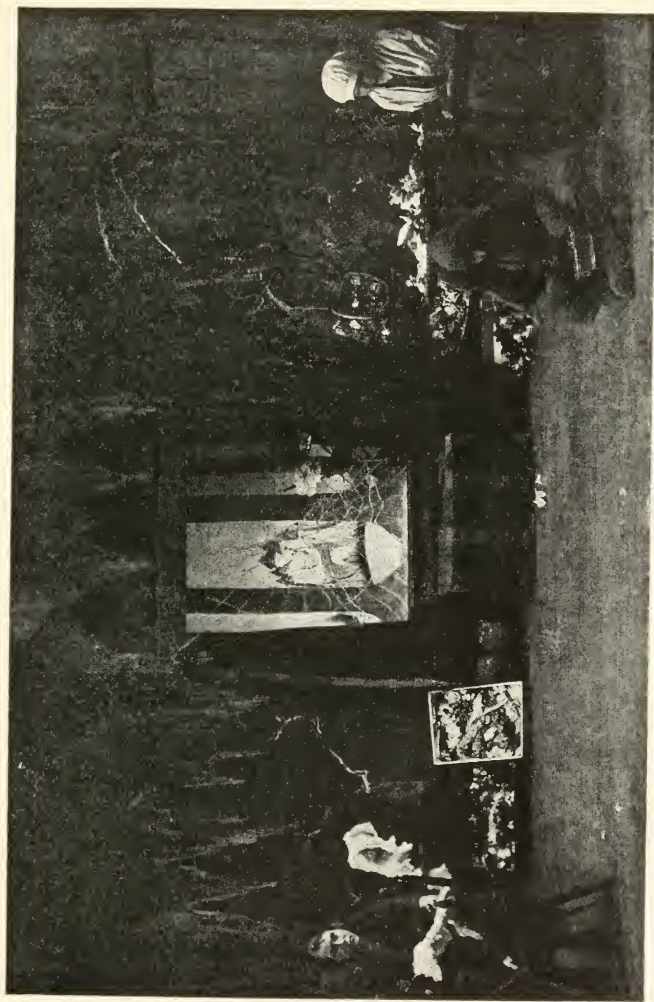
SPIDER WOMAN

So that is why you have been so busy these many long weeks, ever since that Grey Goose was here with his false chattering.

HELGA

[Defiantly.]

Yes, that is what I have been doing.



Margaret de M. Brown

The Spider Woman cut the web to shreds

SPIDER WOMAN

And this is what I will do.

[She snatches up a pair of great shears and begins cutting the web to shreds.]

Thus will I do—and thus—and thus. There is the end of your precious message to the world, it will never be carried now. Your brother will never find you.

HELGA

He will come, he will come!

TROLL MOTHER

Do you think he will search forever, asking all up and down the world, "Have you seen my lost sister?" No, no, to hope that will bring only pain. Forget that human blood runs in your veins, put aside hope, put aside despair, become a Troll like us who know neither joy nor sorrow. There is naught else to do.

[There is a moment of silence. The SPIDER WOMAN peers at HELGA with sharp eagerness.]

HELGA

No!

[She stands up suddenly and points in turn to each of the three, the YOUNGEST TROLL, the TROLL MOTHER, and the SPIDER WOMAN.]

To be like him who is a hundred years old and has never smiled? To be like her who has forgotten her kinfolk, given up her soul that she may put an end to sorrow. To be like you, malicious, cruel, merciless, everything in you withered away until you are nothing but hard, sharp eyes and lean, brown fingers, spinning, spinning, spinning forever. My soul is still alive within me and it shall not die.

[She begins weaving with renewed energy.]

SPIDER WOMAN

[Shaking a long finger in her face.]

There is no earthly creature who will have courage to seek you all across the world and find you in the House of the Trolls.

HELGA

Some one will find me.

SPIDER WOMAN

No one. No one.

[There is a flutter as of broad wings, the sound of a slamming door, and the GREY GOOSE staggers in and sinks against the loom beside HELGA.]

HELGA

One friend at least has come to me. Did I not say the Grey Goose would come back again?

SPIDER WOMAN

Yes, the Grey Goose with an arrow in his breast.

GREY GOOSE

If Trolls knew how to weep, you would shed tears before this day is out, oh, Spider Woman. You will learn how utterly you have failed to understand human hearts.

SPIDER WOMAN

We shall see whether you are the wiser, or I.

[She opens the curtain at the back of the stage, showing the huge cobweb spun across the window.]

Do you see those spells of my spinning? They are

of the sort that bind human hearts, that will bar the way as though they were of iron. Here is Doubt, here is Wonder-If-It-Is-Worth-While, here is Fear-of-Ridicule, here are Weariness and Despair. Charms a million years old to guard the way against human courage.

[*The GREY GOOSE shakes his head.*]

HELGA

Oh, Grey Goose, what has happened? What ails you?

GREY GOOSE

Pluck out the arrow, my child, and hold your kerchief here to stanch the blood. My wing is broken, but it will mend again. I have come a long, long way, with strength ever growing less, to bid you hope.

HELGA

Did you find my brother?

GREY GOOSE

I found him, but I lost him again, as he sailed below in his white-sailed boat, and I struggled above through the fog and the mist with my crippled wing.

HELGA

And you do not know where he is?

GREY GOOSE

No, but I think he has crossed the sea.

SPIDER WOMAN

There are wide forests between here and the sea.

HELGA

He will find his way through them.

SPIDER WOMAN

There are high mountains.

HELGA

He will climb them.

[*The SPIDER WOMAN takes up her cloak and her distaff.*]

GREY GOOSE

Where are you going?

SPIDER WOMAN

I am going to meet that brother, to blind his eyes, to lead him astray, so that he can never find this place.

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GREY GOOSE

Quick, quick, mend my wing for me, so that I can fly again. She must not go forth alone.

HELGA

[Searching in the heap of fragments of her work.]

Here are black quills and white ones, but no grey feathers such as yours.

GREY GOOSE

Have no heed for the color, grey geese shall fly on black and white wings forever in remembrance of this day. Only make haste.

HELGA

Oh, I can never mend your wing in time.

[The SPIDER WOMAN has her hand on the door, when there is a loud knocking.]

Can it be that he has come?

[The knocking becomes insistent, the SPIDER WOMAN opens the door and the PEACOCK comes in.]

PEACOCK

I have come for the cloak of white feathers that you promised me.

SPIDER WOMAN

Presently, presently, when I return.

PEACOCK

[Blocking the way.]

My cloak of white feathers! You gave your word.

SPIDER WOMAN

You chattering fool, do you not see that I have no time now?

PEACOCK

When Trolls fail to do a task that they have promised, their power is gone forever.

HELGA

Is that true?

GREY GOOSE

Tell us, Spider Woman, is that true?

SPIDER WOMAN

[Dropping her cloak.]

Yes, it is true.

[She moves slowly across to the loom and

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begins picking up the scraps of HELGA's work.]

I bade you weave white peacock's feathers.
Where are they?

HELGA

You cut them in pieces with your great shears.
There are a few that are whole, but they are hard
to find.

SPIDER WOMAN

Here are scarlet feathers, good, noble Peacock.
How well they would become your princely beauty.

PEACOCK

A cloak of white feathers was what you promised me.

SPIDER WOMAN

Here are orange and green.

PEACOCK

I will have none but white.

SPIDER WOMAN

Troll Mother, come hither to help me. I have
a pressing errand there without, I must make haste.

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Help me to sew the cloak for this greedy, grasping bird.

TROLL MOTHER

It was your promise, not mine. The task is not binding upon me.

GREY GOOSE

She has no pity. Why should she have? You robbed her of her soul.

SPIDER WOMAN

[*Working in feverish haste.*]

I am not beaten yet; the cloak will soon be done. That brother may be near, but he will seek long before he finds the way to the House of the Trolls.

[*The PEACOCK is strutting up and down before the YOUNGEST TROLL, not heeding the other talk.*]

PEACOCK

Do you not think that I am a beautiful bird?

YOUNGEST TROLL

No.

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HELGA

She is almost finished, and he has not come.

GREY GOOSE

Hark, do you hear nothing?

[Very faintly comes from the distance the song that OLAF sang. The SPIDER WOMAN takes last frantic stitches.]

SPIDER WOMAN

Here is your cloak, you evil and most obstinate of creatures. Now tell me why you must needs have it at this moment of all times.

PEACOCK

[Slowly.]

Because when you urged me to that cowardly trick of letting fly the arrow, I had no thought save for my own vanity. Yet peacocks dwell with men, they know men's hope and sorrows. And so my heart failed me when I thought of how I had injured my good friend here and had perhaps put an end to the quest of that stout lad, Olaf. He was a good youth and seemed to know truly that a peacock was no ordinary bird.

GREY GOOSE

And so——? Go on, brother, you speak too many words and tell us nothing.

PEACOCK

And so to make amends I vowed that he should have the greatest joy that I could give him, that he should be the very first to see my new, white, shining cloak of peacock's feathers.

[He puts it on and begins preening and admiring himself.]

SPIDER WOMAN

Then go forth and show it to him, and the curse of the Trolls go with you.

PEACOCK

Nay, madam, I bade him come hither to see it and gave him careful word as to just how he could find the hidden way.

[He looks out of the window.]

Yonder he comes now, across the hill.

GREY GOOSE

[To the SPIDER WOMAN.]

An empty head and a simple heart, and the evil fruits of all your wisdom perish.

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SPIDER WOMAN

My spells will hold. No mortal creature will dare pass them.

[OLAF *appears outside the window, HELGA holds out her arms to him.*]

He does not see you.

HELGA

Olaf, Olaf.

SPIDER WOMAN

He does not hear you. He will turn away, he will pass by.

[OLAF *struggles with the web, finally, with a mighty effort, rends it apart and leaps into the room. He snatches the distaff from the SPIDER WOMAN'S hand, breaks it over his knee and flings it across the floor.*]

GREY GOOSE

Your spells are spun to an end, oh, grandmother of all the toiling Trolls.

[HELGA *runs to OLAF, he puts his arm about her.*]

OLAF

I knew I could find you. I have come to carry you home.

[He holds up the broken strands that were across the window.]

I thought they were bars of steel and they were only—spider's webs.

CURTAIN

APPENDIX

HINTS TO PRODUCERS

FROM

HELEN AND FRANK STOUT, DIRECTORS OF
THE POUGHKEEPSIE COMMUNITY
THEATRE

GENERAL

“HELGA and the White Peacock” proves a most valuable addition to the all too scant list of practical children’s plays. Its appeal to a producer will lie not only in the beauty of its thought, and in its lyric charm, but in the fact that it is a thoroughly “workable” play. How many times one comes upon a children’s play that reads well, but proves impossible for a producer of limited facilities. How many times one finds a play that would delight an audience of children but would sorely overtax the ability of a cast of children. And how

woefully often one chooses a play that appeals to the adult reader only to find that it fails to hold an audience of restless little people.

We produced "Helga and the White Peacock" at The Poughkeepsie Community Theatre for six Saturday matinées in the months of November and December, 1921, playing in all to over three thousand children. The first feature of the play that endeared it to us was that it permitted the use of many different types of children. Beauty and grace alone must too often determine the cast of a children's play. There is a multitude of rôles for the dainty little creature with golden curls; she plays almost all leads, Princess, Fairy Queen, and generally monopolizes the stage of the children's theatre. Back in a very obscure corner is a child of keen imagination, an intensive child who craves expression, a child who has perhaps the germ of a dramatic worth that deserves early development. The play that offers her a chance is indeed welcome, and such is "Helga and the White Peacock." Miss Meigs' fantasy gives opportunity both for the display of charm and for good, substantial character work, for intelligent acting.

From the first the children in our cast were enthusiastic about the play, and demonstrated the hold that it had on their imaginations. The characters lived for them, and they speedily identified themselves with their characters. "Better not do that or the ole Spider Woman'll get you," they'd shout, or "Come on home and don't prink any more, you vain Peacock." Gradually the older ones penetrated more and more into the significance of the play, applied its meaning to similar situations in modern life, and, best of all, came to rehearsals with suggestions for intensifying this meaning, thereby showing that they had given real thought to it outside of the theatre.

An extraordinary latitude was likewise noticeable in the appeal of the play to its audiences, for it proved adaptable to listeners of the most varying years. Although our tickets are distributed through the schools and our attendance can to a degree be regulated, tiny tots manage to procure tickets or creep in somehow. They have become a feature to be reckoned with, for, when a play fails to hold them, wriggling limbs, restless little feet, and very audible whispers sometimes ruin the performance

for the older children. Every one who assisted at the production of "Helga and the White Peacock" commented on the remarkable attention of the audience. The story, shorn of any fuller significance, is sufficient to hold the tiny ones; they are vitally concerned with the rescue of a little girl stolen by a satisfyingly wicked witch type, and of course they adore the Peacock and Grey Goose as they always adore any bird or animal on the stage. For the older children there is the added appreciation of the significance of the conflict, and a delight, unconscious perhaps, in the beauty of the lines. It was reassuring to discover that the Spider Woman, although convincingly terrible, did not frighten the children; indeed, she proved a great favorite with small mimics who for some weeks after essayed her malicious "he-he-he."

As for the popularity of the play, we played every performance to our capacity, and our audiences were as large and punctual (they usually begin to arrive some two hours before a production) at the last as at the first performances. Considering that this was the first play of the children's theatre to attempt more than four performances, we had

entertained some doubts of filling the house the additional two Saturdays. These doubts were convincingly dispelled.

Practically our only variation from the text was our introduction of dances. The West Wind whirled in to music and gathered up the cloud stuff in a spirited little dance. When the Spider Woman was trying to lull Olaf to sleep she beckoned in two Slumber Spirits who circled about him in a spell-weaving dance. And, at the beginning of Act III, when Helga and the Youngest Troll were blowing bubbles and "making a rainbow" we interpolated the line "Let's make a rainbow" which introduced a delicate little figure in a charming rainbow dance.

Each producer will probably find it most satisfactory to choose his own music for these dances. The style or type of music to be used will be determined by the talent of the children who are to dance and their ability to interpret music. As suggestions, "The Sunbeam," a dance of Chalif's, with music by him, might be mentioned as in keeping with the mood of the rainbow dance, and Sinding's "Rustle of Spring" as bringing out the spirit of

the West Wind, but others equally or even better suited could no doubt be found.

SCENIC

Another asset of this little play is its adaptability to various scenic treatments in accordance with the facilities of different producing groups. And its great virtue is its suitability to the simplest production. True, a set is almost necessary for Acts I and III, as curtains scarcely give the cramped underground qualities, and doors are needed to emphasize imprisonment; but such a small and crude set is demanded that it is almost certain to be available.

Our own low set of the Troll House was painted earthen brown and broken by weird shapes that vaguely suggested stalactites and roots of trees, hints of the underground. The window center back was covered by the spider's web made of knotted twine, fastened to the outside of the sill on small nails. By slipping off two strands from their nails a greater part of the web would fall (which happened when Olaf broke through); by releasing only one a small portion was released (as when the Troll

Mother broke the web to show Helga a glimpse of the world outside). When the Spider Woman began to respin the web at the end of Act I, fingers unseen by the audience, which had previously released the strands, gathered up the twine until it could again be slipped onto its nail, thus presenting the illusion of the respinning. Behind the window, against the blue plaster sky of our back wall, was a compo board cut-out showing the green world and, far off, the glinting roof of a white-walled castle. During most of the play the window was covered with a dingy curtain, which for easy manipulation was hung by rings on a wire. Our only lighting was from above, supposedly from the round window in the roof. An improvised bunch light (nothing more than a small cluster of bulbs set in a dish pan) sent down a shaft of light onto the characters, but maintained a gloomy background on which great shadows wavered.

In no phase of scenic work is realism more dangerous than in the treatment of a forest scene. One recalls with horror the old days of foliage borders. Leaving that far behind, our production acquired through simple treatment a second act set that pos-

sessed the essential qualities of a forest and a remarkable sense of depth and dignity. The stage was hung with grey curtains save for an opening ten feet wide in the center of the back, and these curtains were arranged in folds to suggest tree trunks. In the opening center back hung a drop of unbleached muslin painted the grey of the curtains and cut into the shapes of tree trunks, with high-up, interlacing branches and a lacy, leafy pattern. These trees stood silhouetted against our blue-tinted back wall, and suggested a clearing in the forest where individual trees stood out from the mass. Between this drop and the back wall stood a low, compo board cut-out of the sea. This of course could be omitted, since one could just as well suppose the sea to be off in the direction of the side walls, but we could not resist giving a glimpse of it, particularly as by means of a strip of red lights behind it, we effected the flush of sunrise at the words "the dawn, the high tide." This simple treatment, accentuating the height of the stage and producing the awesome cathedral-like effect of a forest, was a satisfying background for the Siegfriedian adventures of little Olaf. I be-

lieve if only dark curtains are available they alone would prove effective for this scene, certainly more effective than an ultra-realistic setting.

These sets, shown in the photographs, were the work of Frank Stout.

COSTUMES

In working out the costumes we again tried to avoid the literal and exact and endeavored rather to suggest personality and salient characteristics. Thus we tried to express the beauty and vanity of the Peacock, the homely kindness and dignity of the Grey Goose; and to no great degree were faithful to ornithology. Our Peacock was a tall girl of very high coloring. She wore tight-fitting knickers and, falling over them, a tight, sleeveless jumper of peacock blue sateen. This was painted in vivid green and copper gold to suggest, in formalized method, the breast feathers. From her shoulders there swept a long train of the sateen ending in a fan shape of buckram, gilded and painted with peacock eyes of green and purple. On the under side of this buckram were three snap fasteners. When the Peacock came for his new spring feathers the

Troll Mother produced formalized peacock's feathers of buckram, wired, gilded, and painted, three of which she snapped onto the tail (a never failing source of wonder to our audiences). This train served as the Peacock's tail when she was in profile, but when she faced frontward she could produce a fan-shaped, open tail. For this two yards of green cheesecloth were gathered, drawn up, and the gathering attached at the back of the jumper, midway between the shoulders. The ends of the cloth were then attached to the wrists by bracelets of gilded buckram. When the arms were held down all was hidden by the blue sateen train piece, but on such lines as "I owe it to the world" the Peacock raised her arms to the side and up came her fan most effectively. The green cheesecloth was appliquéd with eyes of purple cloth and gilded in swirling strokes. Her headdress was a narrow band of gilded buckram, from which, in the back, rose a cluster of five wires wrapped in blue sateen and each ending in a tiny fan-shaped piece of gilded buckram. The swaying of the wires and the scintillation of the bits of gold were most pleasing, and the headdress added to the height and hauteur of

the bird of vanity. Stockings of orange completed the costume.

The Grey Goose wore tights, jumper, and a large semi-circular cape of a fleecy grey flannel painted in black and silver into formalized feathers. A tight-fitting cap of this grey held a visor of buckram painted bright yellow which extended out in a beak-like shape but did not hide the features nor prove grotesque or distracting. Webbed feet were achieved by sewing wedges of the yellow covered buckram onto ten-cent bed socks, and painting the whole. The arms of the Goose slipped into the edges of his cape and when he gesticulated maintained the wing-like effect.

All of the Trolls wore brown, of course, and we chose canton flannel because of its substantial and earthy quality. The Troll Mother, who was played by a young girl, acquired white hair by wearing a white cap on the edges of which were pinned strands of white hair that framed her face. This eliminated the always trying problem of a wig.

The Spider Woman wore her brown "with a difference." Her skirt was slit into fluttering strips, a hint of the many-legged quality, and she showed

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an underskirt of rusty black, while an apron of a second shade of muddy brown was looped up about her waist. She had a decided hump fastened to her back under her big brown cape. Her round hood was tight-fitting and made her head seem small. She wore the large horn rims of glasses; her nose was brought out by a line of white make-up (accentuating the inquisitive and malicious characteristics), and she wore brown cotton, long-fingered mittens that were most effective when she spun.

The children who represented abstract forces were costumed in simple drapings. The West Wind was in silver-grey, blue, and lavender, the Slumber Spirits in a soft poppy red, and the rainbow of course in rainbow hues, several layers of metal-dyed silk.

PROPS

The Spider Woman's distaff was wound with very heavy white knitting yarn, the mass of which resembled raw material on a distaff, from which a single thread was unwound and appeared to be spun. The cloud stuff which Helga wove was absorbent cotton, well fluffed out. Toy shops sell

small bows with holes in them which hold the arrow and insure easy shooting. But in case the Peacock, in the excitement of the scene, fails to shoot, he can manage the situation by running into the wings, leaving the arrow, and staggering on stage again as if from the reaction of the shot. The skeins that the Youngest Troll was sorting were paper festoons, and, in general, we found crêpe paper most useful in the production of the wares of the Trolls.

CENTRAL CIRCULATION,
CHILDREN'S ROOM



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